ALFRED.

A

TRAGEDY.

[Price One Shilling and Six Pence.]

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As Performed at the

THEATRE-ROYAL,

IN

COVENT-GARDEN.

—LECTORI CREDERE MAVULT. HOR.

LONDON:

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MDCCLXXVIII.

PREFACE.

THE ſucceſs of a Dramatic piece on the Stage, depends, ſays Voltaire, upon accidental circumſtances, but the day of publication decides its fate.

Perſuaded of the truth of this remark, the Author of the Tragedy of Alfred would have ſubmitted his performance, to the final judgment of the Reader, without preface or apology, if he had not been adviſed, and indeed urged, to make a reply to ſome hoſtile critiſcims, which appear to have been founded upon prejudice and opinion, rather than reaſon and argument.

It has been alledged, that the character of Alfred, in the Tragedy, does not agree with the character of Alfred in Hiſtory: "That the Hero, the Legiſlator, is degraded to a Lover, who enters the Daniſh camp, from a private, not a public, motive, and acts the part of an impoſtor."

In Tragedy, if the ſubject be Hiſtorical, an author is not permitted to introduce events, contrary to the great eſtabliſhed facts of Hiſtory; for inſtance, in the Tragedy of Alfred, the Hero muſt not be killed, nor driven out of England by the Danes; but preſerving thoſe ancient foundations, as the piers of his bridge, the Author may bend his arches, and finiſh the fabrick, according to his taſte and fancy, for the poet is at liberty, and it is the eſſence of his art, to invent ſuch intermediate circumſtances, and incidents, as he thinks will produce the moſt affecting ſituations. In this department, the

the Poet's fancy is controuled by nothing, but probability and conſiſtence of character, the barriers of dramatic truth. Let us apply this principle to the point in diſpute.

Alfred was a young man, when he fought the battle of Ethendune. The victory, which gave him poſſeſſion of the kingdom, muſt have been gained before he begun to model the ſtate. Is it improbable to ſuppoſe, that a young hero was in love? Is it inconſiſtent to repreſent the perſon, who was a Legiſlator, when advanced in years, as a lover in his youth! Does it degrade the character of a hero to ſuppoſe, that he was in love with the princeſs, whom he afterwards married? Is it not rather injurious to his heroiſm to conclude, that he choſe a conſort whom he did not love? If this reaſoning is juſt, there will be no difficulty in vindicating the ſubſequent conduct of the hero. The dramatic and the real Alfred,

are both involved in the charge of impoſture; both enter the Daniſh camp in diſguiſe; the previous events, as narrated in the tragedy, are nearly the ſame with thoſe mentioned in hiſtory. Alfred, for almoſt two years, had wandered thro' England, concealing himſelf under feigned names and characters. He lived in the midſt of his enemies, by being ſuppoſed to be dead. Emerging from this obſcurity, he appears in the tragedy, and is informed of the alarming, ambigous ſituation of Ethelſwida; his uſual ſtratagems preſent themſelves, one would think, naturally to his mind, extremely agitated, and prone both by temper and habit, to the moſt daring and romantic enterprizes. He reſolves to enter the Daniſh camp, to learn the fate of Ethelſwida, and obſerve the ſtrength and order of the enemy's army, before he ventures a deciſive engagement.

The

The continued artifice is inevitable. The conduct of Alfred, in the camp of Hinguar; the manner in which he deceives the Dane, is extremely ſimilar to the conduct of Oreſtes in the Electra of Sophocles, which no critic hitherto has blamed. Oreſtes enters the palace of Ægiſthus, as the meſſenger of his own death, carrying an urn, which contains (he ſays) the aſhes of Oreſtes, whoſe untimely fate he moſt circumſtantially relates. The Grecian hero practiſes the deceit with an intention to kill the perſons whom he deceives. The Engliſh hero deceives Hinguar only to gain acceſs to Ethelſwida, without meaning to hurt the perſon of his enemy. To praiſe Sophocles, and blame the author of Alfred, for the ſame conduct, ſeems a direct contradiction, which can only be accounted for, in one way; an imaginary idea has been formed of the character of Alfred as an old mortified, aſcetic ſage, of ſpirit too ſublime and ætherial

to deſcend to human paſſions or human actions. But the real as well as the dramatic Alfred was a young hero, a bard, a winner of battles, brave and magnanimous, but compelled by the preſſure of thoſe deſperate times, in which he lived, to practiſe a thouſand arts, to exiſt by ſimulation and diſſimulation. Whoever recollects and weighs theſe circumſtances, will it is preſumed readily pardon the artifice of Alfred, in the Tragedy, and acknowledge that the *feigned* incidents of the piece are altogether conſiſtent with the true. If not, the author muſt be contented to labour under the imputation of an erroneous judgment, for he meant nothing leſs than to degrade the character of Alfred; on the contrary, finding in the records of a remote and barbarous age, a hero of great renown, but from the defect of his hiſtorians, involved in clouds and darkneſs:

Qui caput inter nubila condit,

he

he was tempted to ſeize his name, and diſplay his character in new ſituations connected with the old and well known events of his life and fortune. The play is printed as it was performed. An alteration has been made, in one ſcene, and ſent to the Theatre, which, if the Tragedy ſhould be reſumed or revived, may perhaps contribute to heighten its effect.

PROLOGUE.

TO furniſh a new Prologue for each Play,
To dreſs the ſelf-ſame diſh, a different way;
Exhauſts the poet's art. And every year,
Palates grow nicer, rarities more dear.
The cabinet, who in the green room ſit,
The ſecret junto of the realm of wit;
In theſe hard times, reſolved their ſtock to ſpare,
And crib the Prologue from the bill of fare.
Alfred *on Engliſh ground* alone *may ſtand,*
The darling hero of his native land:
No, no, *our Poet cry'd*---this is no time,
Nor is it prudent now to ſave your rhime;
Fir'd with my ſubject I have raſhly dar'd,
And you in Prologue ſhould protect your bard:
When my adventurous muſe, indulg'd before,
Now vent'ring further, needs indulgence more;
She dares to trace the workings of a mind,
The greateſt and the beſt of human kind;
Adjuſt its movements to dramatic plan,
And blend the god-like hero with the man.
The greater Alfred's *fame, our bard riſks more;*
Such weight the flying courſer never bore.
Alfred! *whoſe life ſuch ſtrange events adorn,*
That hiſtory beholds romance with ſcorn;
Him to preſent, here in his native land,
Where ſtill his genius, and his laws command,
Is an attempt like his, who raſhly tried,
The burning chariot of the ſun to guide!
Yet this attempt from admiration roſe,
Nor ſhould he *find in* Alfred's *kingdom, foes:*
He, who by temper led, not love of fame,
Is the fond eccho of your hero's name.

PROLOGUE.

EPILOGUE.

By Mr. GARRICK.

OUR bards of late, ſo tragic in their calling,
Have ſcarce preſerv'd one heroine *from falling:*
Whether the dame be widow, maid, or wife,
She ſeldom from their *hands eſcapes with life:*
If this green cloth could ſpeak, would it not tell,
Upon it's well-worn nap how oft I fell?
To death in various forms deliver'd up,
Steel *kills me one night, and the next the* Cup:
The tragic proceſs is as ſhort, as certain;
*With** THIS,—*or* †THIS, *I drop—then drops the curtain;*
No ſaint can lead a better life then I,
For half is ſpent in ſtudy'ng how to die:
The learn'd diſpute, how Tragedies ſhould end;
O happily *ſay ſome—Some* death *defend:*
Mild *criticks wiſh good fortune to the good;*
While others hot-brain'd, *roar for blood! blood! blood!—*
The fair, tho' nervous, tragic to the ſoul,
Delights in daggers, and the poiſon'd bowl:
" I would not give a black-pin for a Play,
" Unleſs in tenderneſs I melt away:
" From pangs, and death no lovers would I ſave,
" They ſhould be wretched, and deſpair and rave;
" And ne'er together lie—but in the grave!"
The brave rough ſoldier, *a* ſoft *heart diſcovers*
He ſwears and weeps at once, when dead the lovers:
As down his cheeks run trickling nature's tide,
" Damn it—I wiſh thoſe young ones had not dy'd:"
The' from his eyes the drop of pity falls,
He fights like Cæſar, *when his country calls:*
In ſpite of critic laws, our bard takes part,
And joins in concert with the ſoldier's heart:
O *let* your *feelings with this party ſide,*
For once forgive me that I have not dy'd;
Too hard that fate, which kills a virgin bride!

* She makes the motion of ſtabbing.
† And here of drinking poiſon.

Dramatis Perſonæ.

MEN.

ALFRED, King of England,	Mr. LEWIS.
EDWIN, Earl of Devonſhire,	Mr. HULL.
EARL of SURREY,	Mr. WHITEFIELD
HINGUAR, King of the Danes,	Mr. AIKIN.
ROLLO, a Daniſh Chief,	Mr. L'ESTRANGE

OFFICERS, Engliſh and Daniſh.

WOMEN.

ETHELSWIDA, { betrothed to Alfred, }	Mrs. BARRY.
RONEX, Conſort of Hinguar,	Mrs. JACKSON.
EDDA, ELISA, } Attendants on Ethelſwida.	

ALFRED.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I.

SCENE I. *A Camp.*

Earl of DEVONSHIRE, *and* OFFICER.

OFFICER.

THE name of Surrey and the ſhield he bore,
With eaſe deceived the unſuſpecting ſoldier:
I knew the port of Alfred.

DEVONSHIRE.

So he thought;
And, ere he laid his weary limbs to reſt,
Gave me, in charge, to warn thee to be ſilent.

OFFICER.

My Lord of Devonſhire, on me depend.
Steel ſhall not tear the ſecret from my breaſt;
Aſtoniſh'd as I am, at ſuch a ſecret;
Who can unfold the cauſe? Why, at this hour,
When, big with England's fate, each moment rolls,
Does Alfred hide himſelf, in clouds and darkneſs?
And ſpread uncertain rumours of his ſtate?
Confounding all belief.

DEVONSHIRE.

He ſpread them not.
From his uncertain fate, thoſe rumours roſe,
Ere ſince that time, when the perfidious Dane
Attack'd the Engliſh, in the hour of peace;
On Alfred's wedding day.

OFFICER.

It was believed,
That Alfred, in the general carnage, fell,
At Cyppenham; that, in the ſwelling flood
Of wintry Avon, Ethelſwida periſh'd.

DEVONSHIRE.

Such was the firſt report.

OFFICER.

Fain would I hear
Th' eventful tale of much-enduring Alfred;
And what is yet of Ethelſwida known.

DEVONSHIRE.

When faithleſs Hinguar, with his hoſt, advanc'd,
The King, diſtracted for his lovely bride,
Sent off a hundred knights, by Surrey led,
To guard the Princeſs to a place of ſafety:

Then,

Then, furious, fac'd the Dane;—with odds oppreſt,
Around their King, his faithful nobles fell.
Alfred, by favour of the night, eſcap'd,
And wander'd long, obſcure, from place to place,
Thro' woods and foreſts, like ſome beaſt of prey,
By cruel hunters chac'd. Much he endur'd;
And much his people ſuffer'd. Engliſh virtue,
Like England's oak, grew firmer from the ſtorm.
Often the peaſant his laſt morſel brought
To the dark wood or cave, where Alfred lay;
If queſtion'd by the Dane, denied the deed;
And died, undaunted, to preſerve his prince.

OFFICER.

The ſtory thrills my blood; by heaven and earth—
Where did he reſt at laſt?

DEVONSHIRE.

He never reſted;
Even when he had a place of refuge found;
Where the deep winding ſtreams, Parret and Thone
Their waters mix, a little iſland lies,
With alders overgrown. No name it had,
Tho' now the name of Athelney it bears.
Marſhes and pools, by inundation form'd,
Perplex the dire approach. There Alfred fix'd
His dreary habitation. Two brave knights
At firſt were all his train. Day after day
The numbers grew; and many a gallant knight,
Found out the wild aſylum of his Lord.
From thence, with inroads fierce, they gall'd the Dane.
Dark as the ſpirits of the night they came,
And vaniſh'd at the dawn. In that retreat,
The ſun, thro' every ſign, o'er Alfred roll'd.

OFFICER.

Did Ethelſwida there rejoin her Lord?

DEVONSHIRE.

Nor ſhe herſelf, nor any of her train,
Have ere been heard of, ſince ſhe left her Lord.

OFFICER.

For certain, then, ſhe lives. If ſhe had periſh'd,
Her fate would have been known.

DEVONSHIRE.

The Danes aſcrib'd
To me the inroads made by daring Alfred;
And both the Daniſh princes took the field.
Hinguar, with fire and ſword laid waſte the land.
Hubba, his hoſt to Kenwith caſtle led,
And, with ſtrong ſiege, begirt my ancient towers.
Then Alfred iſſued from his lonely iſle,
Conceal'd, as now, beneath another name.

OFFICER.

Did Alfred fight in Kenwith's bloody field?

DEVONSHIRE.

He fix'd the fortune of that doubtful day.
When Hubba with his life the REAFEN loſt,
Th' inchanted ſtandard, on whoſe magic wings
Conqueſt, till then, had flown. The battle won,
Alfred, impatient, bent his rapid courſe
To Weſtmorland; where, as he fondly hop'd
His Ethelſwida dwelt. He found her not;
And, late laſt night, in deep deſpair, return'd.

OFFICER.

I ſee the clouded tract, thro' which he paſs'd
Inviſible.—Now he has reach'd the point,
And will break forth in ſplendor. We ſhall fight
To-morrow or to-day.

DEVONSHIRE.

On theſe ſteep hills,
By nature and by art, impregnable,
Which far and wide command Wiltonia's vale,
In abſence of the King, my camp I pitch'd.
Audacious Hinguar occupies the plain,
And braves us to deſcend.

OFFICER.

Proclaim the King,
The King of England, at his people's head,
Then roll their riſing valour on the foe.

DEVONSHIRE.

Thy zeal becomes thee. He will chuſe his time.
Mean while, the ſtory of his death believ'd,
Leſſens the weight and burden of the war;
Prevents the junction of the Daniſh chiefs,
And makes our foes ſecure. Soldier, farewell!
The King expects me: In my tent he reſts.

OFFICER.

My boſom throbs to ſee him riſe in arms. [*Exit.*

Manet DEVONSHIRE.

Spirits in Heaven may there attain perfection;
But weakneſs in this world, is nature's ſtamp,
With which ſhe marks the ſons of men her own.
Who can compare with this accompliſh'd Prince,
In valour or in virtue? He excells
The Counſellor, the Sage, in civil wiſdom.
The light of ancient times ſhines in his ſoul;
And the Bards liſten to his voice divine:
But vain his virtue and his wiſdom vain,
Againſt affection's power, too much he lov'd,

And

And mourns too much his Ethelſwida loſt.
He comes with grief oppreſs'd.

Enter ALFRED.

Health to the King!
Has balmy ſleep deſcended on his cares?

ALFRED.

My ſleep is haunted with my waking thoughts;
The viſion of the night is Ethelſwida.
Sometimes, a broken ſcene of other woes
My troubled fancy to her image joins,
And adds the monarch's to the lover's grief.
This very night, in dreams, I thought myſelf
Under the friendly roof, where once I lay,
Beſet, on every ſide, with Daniſh ſpears;
When, to preſerve my life, a noble youth,
The only offspring of a widow'd dame,
Unknown to me, my perſonage aſſum'd,
And ſtopp'd the hounds, that bay'd for Alfred's blood.

DEVONSHIRE.

O gen'rous youth!

ALFRED.

Full in the gate he ſtood;
And brandiſhing his ſword, aloud proclaim'd,
That England's King alive ſhould ne'er be taken.
Headlong the foes ruſh'd on: Numbers he ſlew:
At laſt, unſhrinking, in his place he fell;
And ſtill the Danes believe that youth was Alfred.

DEVONSHIRE.

No wonder that they ſhould!—

ALFRED.

This very night.
Pale in his wounds, the gallant form appear'd,
Whilſt o'er the bleeding body of her ſon,
Majeſtic in her grief, his mother hung.

Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER, (*to* Devonſhire.)

A warrior from the Daniſh camp, demands
Admittance to thy preſence.

ALFRED.

Let him enter. [*Exit* Meſſ.

(Alfred *walks aſide.*)

Enter a WARRIOR, *with his beaver down.*

DEVONSHIRE.

Stranger, unfold thy purpoſe.

(*He takes off his helmet.*)

Surrey, by heaven,
In Daniſh armour!

(Alfred, *turning, ſees him.*)

ALFRED.

Ha!

SURREY.

My royal maſter!

ALFRED.

Surrey! that ſtrange array, thy aſpect ſad
Denounce thy tidings.—Ethelſwida—

SURREY.

Lives.

ALFRED.

She lives!—Why, like the meſſenger of death,
Doſt thou before me ſtand? Some dreadful thing
Thou ſmother'ſt in that pauſe. I charge thee ſpeak.
What has befallen my love?

SURREY.

Captivity—

ALFRED.

Is Ethelſwida captive?

SURREY.

Yes, my Lord.

ALFRED.

To whom?

SURREY.

To Hinguar.

ALFRED.

To my mortal foe!
Is ſhe in Hinguar's power? Is brutal Hinguar
The maſter of her fate?

SURREY.

Would that I durſt
This painful truth deny.

ALFRED.

O wretched Alfred!
Deſtin'd to ſuffer miſery and ſhame,
That princes ſeldom feel! All other ills,
Altho' in troops they came, I have endur'd.
Manhood and patience yield to this. O, Surrey!
Had I been Surrey, and hadſt thou been Alfred,
I ne'er had brought ſuch tidings to my friend!

SURREY.

Great is the grief, that renders thee unjuſt.
Hear me, O King! and, if thou blam'ſt me then,
Ill-fated Surrey ſhall offend no more.

ALFRED.

What has my paſſion ſpoke? Thy pallid cheek,
Thy hollow eye, thoſe inauſpicious arms,
Are ſignals of diſtreſs!

SURREY.

The ſtory hear,
Of Ethelſwida's fortune; how it chanced,
That Surrey lives to tell it.

ALFRED.

O, my friend!
Forget my words. With deſtiny at odds,
And with myſelf, impatience glanc'd at thee,
The martyr of my cauſe.

SURREY.

That fatal night,
When, with my precious charge, I left my Lord,
Thro' many dangers happily we paſs'd;
But when we reached fair Eden's diſtant vale,
We found no refuge there.

ALFRED.

Too well I know,
The Scots had raz'd Pendragon's lofty tower;
Then, whither didſt thou fly?

SURREY.

There I diſmiſs'd
Moſt of my faithful knights. A few I kept,
Of choſen men the choice. Eaſtward we ſteer'd,

Towards the wilds, beyond the ſource of Tine.
By midnight marches, in untrodden paths,
That wind o'er mountains vaſt, thro' valleys deep;
We reach'd a lonely manſion, in a dale,
Which at the foot of ſnow-clad Cheviot lies.
There Ethelſwida found a ſafe retreat;
And in thoſe deſerts wild, ſhe might have dwelt,
Unheard of and unknown.

ALFRED.

Why did ſhe not?

SURREY.

The rumour of thy death a tempeſt rais'd,
Which, from that harbour, drove her out to ſea.
On me ſhe laid her abſolute commands,
To guide and guard her, as I could, to Kenwith:
My friends I warn'd to meet us on our way,
And on we went, till one unhappy time,
The Danes ſurpriz'd us in a narrow vale.
Againſt their fierce attack, our little band,
Around the Princeſs, form'd a fence of ſteel.
More and more narrow ſtill the circle grew,
Till I alone was left with Ethelſwida.
Alone I fought, till at her feet I fell.
Her diſmal ſhrieks, her piercing cries I heard;
More grievous far, than all the wounds I bore.

ALFRED.

Methinks I hear her cries: She call'd on Alfred;
Did ſhe not, Surrey? Providence divine!
Why was not Alfred near?

SURREY.

As I have heard,
From ſome who in the troops of Hinguar fought,
For he it was who led the hoſtile band,

She

She ſwoon'd with grief and terror on the ſpot.
The Dane to her unwonted pity ſhow'd,
And rais'd her from the ground.

ALFRED.

Tell me the truth;
Do not deceive me, Surrey.

SURREY.

O, my Lord,
I never did, nor will I now deceive thee!
But of the Princeſs this I only know,.
That in the Daniſh camp, ſhe ſtill remains,
Guarded with care, her name and rank unknown.

ALFRED.

What ſhould I think! Can ſhe ſubmit to live—
To live, her honour loſt? How didſt thou 'ſcape
From ſuch a ſlaughter? And how cam'ſt thou hither,
Commiſſion'd by the Dane?

SURREY.

When night came on,
Some Engliſh peaſants, who had ſeen the fight,
Crept from their huts, in ſecret, to the field,
With pious purpoſe to inter the dead.
In me alone, ſome ſparks of life they found.
Their care preſerv'd me. When my ſtrength return'd,
To Hinguar's camp I went, gave out myſelf
Of Daniſh race, altho' in England born.
My ſervice was accepted. I have found
Favour in Hinguar's ſight; and, in the band
That guards his perſon, ſerve. From them I learn'd,
That Ethelſwida, near his tent, is lodg'd
A mournful captive,

ALFRED.

Near his tent! O heaven!
How have I merited?

DEVONSHIRE.

Raiſe not thine eyes,
Nor lift thy hands to heaven: Far other looks,
Far other actions, heaven of thee requires.
Thou art a king, a ſoldier, and a lover;
Fight for thy crown, thy country, and thy bride.
Go forth, this inſtant, animate thy troops,
And lead them to revenge their wrongs and thine.
(Alfred *muſes.*
Why does my royal maſter hang his head,
And bend on earth his eyes?

ALFRED.

Forbear, my Lord.
(*To* Surrey.) What is thine errand to the camp of England?

SURREY.

To offer battle.—But the true intent
Of Hinguar, is to learn if Alfred lives;
For various rumours have perplex'd the Dane.

ALFRED.

He ſhall be ſatisfied. I ſee a ray,
Which thro' the darkneſs breaks. It grows more bright.
My friend, the tumult of my thoughts forgive.
Surrey! (*Goes aſide with* Surrey.)

Manet DEVONSHIRE.

What does he meditate? I know
His mind with dreadful images is fill'd.

In

In Hinguar's arms he ſees his raviſh'd bride:
Raviſh'd or not, ſhe's captive to his foe.
Enſlav'd by force, 'tis force muſt ſet her free.
He cannot treat with Hinguar; that he knows,
By ſad experience; for the woes of Alfred,
And all the evils of this hapleſs land,
Aroſe from England's confidence in Denmark.
No ties divine or human, bind the Danes.
Of all the impious race, by far the worſt,
And moſt profane is Hinguar.

ALFRED, (*to* Surrey.)

Go, prepare
For my reception.

SURREY.

Ah, may heaven avert,
Thoſe ills, which my prophetic ſoul forebodes!
[*Exit* Surrey.

DEVONSHIRE.

I heard the parting words of faithful Surrey,
Which mark too well, the colour of thy purpoſe.

ALFRED.

Thy approbation I do not expect.
None can approve, but thoſe who feel like me.
The Daniſh camp, diſguis'd, I will explore,
Clad in the veſture of a Britiſh Bard,
And learn, for certain, Ethelſwida's fate,
Whatever has befallen my hapleſs bride;
Aſſur'd of that, my heart ſhall ſhake no more.

DEVONSHIRE.

Something like this my anxious ſoul foretold.

ALFRED.

I read thy thoughts, but urge me not to hear
Thy friendly counſels, which I cannot follow.
In great events, the agitated mind
Conſults its genius only. Low or high
The active ſpirits in that level flow,
Nor fall nor riſe, to act another's counſel;
That potent counſellor directs me now,
I feel the impulſe, oft in perils felt:
Nor is my arm confin'd to Ethelſwida;
The ſtrength and order of the Daniſh hoſt,
How, and what quarter, I may beſt attack,
Attentive I'll obſerve.

DEVONSHIRE.

Since thou haſt fix'd
Thy reſolution, to contend is vain;
The part of friendſhip now is to conſult,
How we may guard thee beſt.

ALFRED.

By the moon's light,
As, with a ſwift career, their camp I paſs'd,
A wood, extended on the right I ſaw,
(Their left the village Ethendune defends,)
Canſt thou inform, if they have opened paths,
Or planted watches there?

DEVONSHIRE.

Neither, my Lord!
Preſumptuous Hinguar holds ſuch caution vain.

ALFRED.

When duſky eve deſcends, in the dark time
Between the fall of night, and the moon's riſe,
In ſilence, thither march a thouſand men,
Choſen with care, the braveſt of our hoſt;

There

There let them watch till morn, if no alarm
Comes ere the dawn, at dawn they may retire.

DEVONSHIRE.

To chooſe and lead that band ſhall be my care:
My warriours are the Hunters of the Hill;
Accuſtom'd to the woods, fearleſs they move,
By the pale glimpſes of the clouded moon!
To them the changeful aſpects of the night,
Whoſe falſe preſentments armies oft confound,
In all their forms are known.

ALFRED.

I wou'd not wiſh
A better leader, nor a braver band.

DEVONSHIRE.

The word.

ALFRED.

St. George.

DEVONSHIRE.

O, may he guard the King!
And, as the minds of yonder heathen hoſt,
In darkneſs lie; ſo may their eyes be dark
And blind to Alfred!

ALFRED.

As they ſtill have been,
This is no new, tho' ſeeming bold attempt.
I have eſſay'd it, for a ſlighter cauſe,
When, in the Iſle of Athelney, I lay,
The quarters of the Dane I oft explor'd,
In this diſguiſe, and mark'd deſtruction's line.
Farewell, thy wiſdom no direction needs;
Nor ſhall I long be abſent from my friend. [*Exeunt.*

End of the FIRST Act.

ACT

ACT II.

SCENE, *The Daniſh Camp.*

Enter SURREY.

SURREY.

THE tale of Orpheus, (which in Rome I heard,)
Whoſe lyre harmonious civiliz'd mankind,
Is verified to-day. The ſtubborn ſons,
Of Denmark ſympathize with Alfred's ſtrain;
And, as he leads the ſong, their paſſions flow.
Hinguar himſelf is wonder-ſtruck.

Enter an OFFICER.

OFFICER.

Be gone;
Thou tread'ſt already on forbidden ground.

SURREY.

Inform the King, that Erick is return'd.

OFFICER.

Hinguar approaches, and with him the bard,
Whoſe lyre is fram'd, by necromantic art;
Inchanted are the ſtrings.—Away, with ſpeed.

(*Exit* Surrey.

Enter

Enter HINGUAR *and* ALFRED, *in converſation.*

HINGUAR. (*To the Officer.*)

Withdraw. (*Exit* Off.)

Now, I believe the death of Alfred.
This ring, the well-known ſignet of his power,
He never truſted to another hand.

ALFRED.

When, in the rocky cave, I found him dead,
I then reſolv'd, King of the warlike Danes,
To bear to thee the tidings of his death;
And as a proof, which could not be deny'd,
That ring I took, which erſt mine eyes beheld,
Upon his finger plac'd, with rites and charms,
When he was crown'd, in London, England's King.

HINGUAR.

I will reward thee to thy utmoſt wiſh.
Thou art no Saxon, but of Britiſh race,
And lov'ſt the mountains of thy native land;
Chooſe where they faireſt riſe; they ſhall be thine,
With all their valleys and their Sylvan ſtreams.
The Gods I ſerve have ſent thee to my aid.
'Tis my belief thou can'ſt aſſiſt me much,
In what is dearer to my ſoul than empire.

ALFRED.

How can the bard aſſiſt a Prince like thee?

HINGUAR.

In high reſpect, I hold thy art divine.
Whate'er thou art, magician, bard or ſeer,
Or if thou art all theſe, I crave thine aid.
Amidſt my victories, I am moſt wretched;
By love tormented, unſucceſsful love.

ALFRED.

Thy love, with equal love, is not return'd?

HINGUAR.

More grievous ſtill. The fair, my ſoul deſires,
Cannot diſtinguiſh nor reward my love.
If thou her cruel malady can'ſt charm,
And drive wild frenzy from her troubled mind,
Taſk to fulfil thy wiſh the power of Hinguar.

ALFRED.

In me behold the man of thy deſire.
Unlawful arts I neither uſe, nor know;
But am, in nature's ſecrets, deeply ſkill'd.
Far from the pleaſures and the cares of men,
By ſtrange misfortune, to the deſart driven,
A lonely anchoret, for years, I lived.
To me are known the virtues of each plant,
That grows in hill or dale, in ſun or ſhade;
How one, by ſympathy, with madneſs raints;
And how another clears th' infected blood.
Much I can help or harm.

HINGUAR.

Exert thy ſkill;
And plant and herb, or ſong and ſpell employ.
Do what thou wilt'ſt, ſo thou reſtor'ſt the fair.

ALFRED.

Did her dire frenzy from diſtreſs ariſe?
From ſudden perturbation of the mind?
Or is the cauſe unknown?

HINGUAR.

From grief, from fear,
From terror to exceſs, her frenzy roſe.
Dreadful the ſhock ſhe ſuffered!

ALFRED.

How, my Lord?
What did ſhe ſuffer?

HINGUAR.

In her perſon, nothing;
But agony of mind, to an exceſs,
Not eaſy to deſcribe.

ALFRED.

Has ſhe reveal'd
Her name, her family?

HINGUAR.

By different names
She calls herſelf; and when with queſtions urg'd,
She makes extravagant, fantaſtic anſwers,
And ſeems unconſcious of her true condition.

ALFRED.

Her general temper, is it ſad or gay?
For frenzy is moſt various.

HINGUAR.

So is hers;
For ſhe exhibits every various mood,
That frenzy e'er aſſum'd. But thou ſhalt ſee,
And judge her ſtrange demeanor. In yon tent,
With purple bright, ſhe dwells; and to this ſpot,
Where now we ſtand, ſhe frequently repairs.
This is her uſual hour. Behold! ſhe comes.

(*Enter* Ethelſwida, *with two women attending, fantaſtically dreſt.*)

ALFRED.

How beautiful ſhe is! O, piteous ſight!
Her frenzy's high.

HINGUAR.

Did ere thine aged eyes
Behold her equal?

(Ethelſwida *paſſes them, and advances to the front.*)

ETHELSWIDA.

Eagles of the rock,
Lend me your ſounding wings; cherubs of heaven,
Who ſoar above the ſun, your pinions lend,
To bear me to my love.

HINGUAR, *(to Alfred.)*

Obſerve!

ALFRED.

I do.

ETHELSWIDA.

The creſted ſwans were heard to ſing
A ſad lamenting ſtrain;
As floating with the ſtream, his corſe
Deſcended to the main.

HINGUAR.

Still of a lover loſt. I never heard
Her roving words tend to one point ſo long.

ALFRED.

Sorrow and rage exceſſive, both are madneſs.
Time always cures them, if the frame is ſound.—
She ſpeaks again.

ETHELSWIDA.

My heart ſwells in my breaſt,
And ſtops my breath. Oceans of tears I ſhed,
And ſhake the high pavilion with my ſighs.

But

But neither ſighs nor tears give me relief.
(*To* Hinguar.) Thou keeper of the keys of death and hell,
Unlock the iron gate, and ſet me free.
Then I ſhall ſmile and thank thee.

HINGUAR.

Queen of beauty!
I am thy captive, and obey thy will.
To ſoothe the grief that preys upon thy heart,
My care has hither brought a Bard divine,
Whoſe voice can charm the ache and agony,
Which ſpirits feel. He's gentle, mild, and wiſe,
And ſhall attend thy call.

ETHELSWIDA.

I will not call him.
His garb is vile; I hate it.

ALFRED.

Hate not him.
Whoſe heart is tun'd to ſympathize with thine.
I ſhun the houſe of mirth, and love to dwell,
A conſtant inmate of the houſe of ſorrow.
(*Whilſt he ſpeaks*, Ethelſwida *gazes and knows him.*)

ETHELSWIDA.

Then thou art not ſo wiſe, as wou'd appear,
From thy white head, and grave habiliments.
(*Walks aſide in great emotion. Returns.*)
If thou art fond and weak, and fooliſh too;
Why, ſo am I. We may conſort together,
And build ſtrong caſtles.

ALFRED.

Yes.

ETHELSWIDA.

Thy harp ſhall move
The trees and rocks. In order they ſhall riſe,
As high as Babel's tower.

ALFRED.

Forthwith they ſhall.

ETHELSWIDA.

Are all thy ſongs of melancholy ſtrain?

ALFRED.

The greater part.

ETHELSWIDA.

Then thou haſt loſt thy love;
Elſe thou could'ſt ne'er have felt true melancholy.
I will not hear thee now. I'm poor in ſpirit,
And have not force to bear a ſtrong affection.
I chooſe a garland ſong, a lighter ſtrain.

There liv'd a youth, by ſilver Thames,
Who lov'd the maidens fair;
But looſe, at large, the rover rang'd,
Nor felt a lover's care.

We muſt not with one cenſure level all.
Some men are true of heart, but very few.
Thoſe live not long, they die before their time.
'Tis pity of them. Oh! [*walks aſide.*

HINGUAR.

A ſhow'r of tears
Faſt falling calms the tempeſt of her mind.

ALFRED.

'Tis a deep rooted malady.

Enter

Enter a DANISH OFFICER.

OFFICER.

My Lord,
A troop of Engliſh horſemen, from the hill,
Deſcend into the plain. Our warriours wait,
Impatient, thy commands.

HINGUAR.

I come. (*Exit Officer.*)
(*To Alfred.*) Remain,
Till I return. Edda, Eliſa, mark me.
Give her full ſcope; in nothing croſs her mood,
That this reflecting ſage, compleat, may ſee
The picture of her mind. (*Exit.*)

ETHELSWIDA.

(*After a pauſe, approaches Alfred.*)

Thou pilgrim ſad,
Whoſe head the hand of time hath ſilver'd o'er,
Com'ſt thou from Paleſtine?

ALFRED.

From Rome I come.

ETHELSWIDA.

From Rome! Thou doſt not wear thy triple crown;
And yet I know thou art the holy Sire,
The common father of the Chriſtian world.
Compaſſion ſhow to me.—with wicked men,
With heathens and idolaters, I dwell;
Without the benefit of holy church.
Nor ſhrift, nor abſolution have I known,
For ſeven long years.

ALFRED.

I will, myſelf, confeſs thee.
The peace of heaven ſhall on thy ſoul deſcend.
(*To the attendants.*) A courſe moſt fortunate her fancy ſteers;
Moſt likely to effect the King's deſire.
In this conceit, to me ſhe may reveal
Her name, her parentage, perhaps the grief
That rankles in her breaſt. Pleaſe to retire,
As if it were confeſſion.

ELISA.

Haſte away,
For fickle is her mind.

EDDA, (*going.*)

I like it not.
This may be ſtratagem: They're Saxons all.
'Tis fit they be obſerv'd. I'll keep in ſight. [*Exeunt.*

Manet ALFRED *and* ETHELSWIDA.

ETHELSWIDA.

Alfred!——

ALFRED.

Ethelſwida! (*offers to embrace her.*)

ETHELSWIDA.

O, beware!
Death lurks in every corner. Why expoſe
Thy noble life to ſuch inglorious peril?
Not thus did I expect to ſee the King.
If 'ere mine eyes beheld my Lord again,
I hop'd to ſee him in the light of ſteel,
Prompt to defend himſelf, or reſcue me.
Why com'ſt thou thus?

I come

ALFRED.

I come to know thy fate.
For, ſince I heard thou waſt in Hinguar's power,
Diſtraction here has reign'd,

ETHELSWIDA.

I comprehend thee.
Could Alfred think I wou'd ſurvive my honour?

ALFRED.

I knew not what to think: But much I fear'd.

ETHELSWIDA.

Diſmiſs that fear; and be of this aſſur'd,
I ſhall be as I am, or ſhall be nothing.
Fly from this place of peril; fly, with ſpeed.
Thy preſence to us both is ſure perdition.
My own diſtreſs, with fortitude, I bore:
But feel my weakneſs, when the danger's thine.
The part I act, I hardly can ſuſtain.
Didſt thou not mark, when firſt I heard thy voice,
How real paſſion mingled with the feign'd?
When I beheld thee riſen from the grave,
And braving death again for Ethelſwida,
The veil of frenzy ſcarce conceal'd my tranſport.

ALFRED.

I ſaw thy ſtruggling ſoul, then—not till then,
Athwart the cloud, the beam of reaſon ſhone.

ETHELSWIDA.

Tarry not here; elſe I ſhall loſe my reaſon,
And be the thing I ſeem.

ALFRED.

Till night ſhall ſpread
Her favouring mantle o'er my ſecret ſteps,

I cannot leave this place; and then I hope
To bear thee with me, thro' the hoſt of Denmark.
Of that, we ſhall have time to ſpeak hereafter.
This garb ſecures me frequent, free acceſs.
Now, let me warn thee, ſhou'd it be ſuſpected,
That I am not the perſon I pretend,
Thy ready anſwer muſt, with mine, accord;
I am thy brother; Surrey is my name,
And Emma thine.

ETHELSWIDA.

Alas! Ill-omen'd name!
In my defence, the noble Surrey fell.

ALFRED.

He lives to ſerve thee in the camp of Hinguar.

ETHELSWIDA.

What miracle! mine eyes beheld him ſlain.

ALFRED.

They come, they come; reſume thy wild demeanor.

(Ethelſwida *walks aſide, as formerly.*)

Enter ELISA *and* EDDA.

ELISA.

The King draws near.

ETHELSWIDA.

Array me for his preſence.
I'll have a crown to deck my penſive brows;
It ſhall be made of ſun-beams, and of ſtars,
Caught as they ſhoot: and when the rainbow reſts
Its glowing ſhaft upon the mountains ſide,
I'll dip my robe in gold. Away, away.

[*Exeunt* Eliſa *and* Edda.

Enter

Enter HINGUAR.

HINGUAR.

It was a falſe alarm. The Engliſh horſe,
When we advanc'd againſt them, wheel'd and fled.
What judgment haſt thou form'd? Did ſhe ſay ought
In her confeſſion?

ALFRED.

She flew off at once
From that conceit. Her mind's a burning fire,
Where ſudden thoughts, like wreath's of ſmoak ariſe,
And, parting from the flame, diſperſe in air.
Her ſhatter'd fancy, like a mirror broken,
Reflects no ſingle image juſt and true,
But many falſe ones.

HINGUAR.

Doſt thou hope to cure
The malady, which thou deſcrib'ſt ſo well?

ALFRED.

There is more ground of hope than cauſe of fear.

HINGUAR.

Forthwith the wonders of thine art eſſay;
Meanwhile, within the circle of my tents,
Secure remain. Gothred's imperious daughter,
(Whom in an evil hour, when new in England,
To pleaſe the Danes I was induc'd to wed)
Is in the camp arriv'd. I gueſs her purpoſe,
And will prevent her ſpeed.

(*A voice behind the ſcenes.*)

Preſumptuous ſlave!

(*Another voice.*)

Thou can'ſt not paſs.

Who ſhall oppoſe the Queen?

Enter RONEX.

RONEX.

I come too late; ſhe's gone. Hail to the King;
Who is this minion, that uſurps my place,
And, with mock majeſty, diſhonours Denmark?

HINGUAR.

Outrageous as thou art, reſpect at leaſt
The ſtranger's ear.
(*To* Alfred.) Retire, and ſhun the ſtorm. [*Exit* Alf.

RONEX.

What pageantry is this?

HINGUAR.

Why haſt thou left,
Without permiſſion of thy Lord, the place
Appointed for thee?

RONEX.

Ha! Am I thy ſlave?
That thou preſum'ſt to treat me with ſuch ſcorn.
Haſt thou forgot my birth? do'ſt thou not know
I am the heir of Denmark and of England,—
That in my right thou reign'ſt?

HINGUAR.

To Denmark go;
There o'er thy barren rocks and deſarts reign:
But fair and fertile England is my own.
The ſword, that won, ſhall keep the pleaſant land.
I conquer'd for myſelf.

RONEX.

Talk'ſt thou of conqueſt,
Thou woman's warrior, who conſum'ſt thy days

In

In ſecret, lawleſs, and inglorious love?
Whilſt o'er thy head thy ſlaughter'd brother's ghoſt
For vengeance ſhrieks in vain.

HINGUAR.

None of my foes,
Of whom the felleſt far, I reckon thee,
Shall long elude my vengeance: From this hour,
I caſt thee off; for ever I renounce thee;
And ſoon thou ſhalt behold another queen
Exalted in thy place.

RONEX.

Fulfil thy threat,
And thou ſhalt ſoon behold another King.
The leaders and the ſoldiers of thy hoſt
Revere in me the Scandinavian line.
When I am not thy Queen, thou reign'ſt no more.

HINGUAR.

This inſtant leave me, or by Denmark's Gods,
By Loda's altar, ſtain'd with human blood,
To Iceland's dreary iſle thou ſhalt be borne,
There to repent thy folly.—Guards!

Enter an OFFICER *with* SOLDIERS.

RONEX.

Stand off!
Tyrant, when next we meet—

HINGUAR.

Force her away.
Never let Gothred's daughter enter here.

[*Exeunt* Ronex *and* Guards.

Small is her boasted influence with my people;
And yet her jealous rage is fell and bloody;
My fair Norwegian felt her mortal hate.
I must not trust my lovely captive's life,
To the slight keeping of that officer,
Who yielded to the threats of haughty Ronex.
This instant I'll dismiss him, and appoint
The brave and faithful Erick to his place. [*Exit.*

End of the SECOND Act.

ACT

ACT III.

HINGUAR *and* EDDA.

EDDA.

EARLY my doubts aroſe. I ne'er believ'd
Her malady was real. Often, my Lord,
Have I obſerv'd her looks ſedate and calm:
Then, quick as thought, when ſhe had caught my eye,
She ſtarted into well-diſſembled frenzy.

HINGUAR.

Why ne'er unfold thy doubts?

EDDA.

Till now, I durſt not;
Becauſe I had no proof of my ſuſpicion;
For in thy preſence, with amazing art,
She counterfeits diſtraction. Well I knew
Thy partial love would ill receive a charge
On mere conjecture founded. What I ſaw
This day to certainty has chang'd my doubts.
Try her, my Lord; and if I have deceived thee,
I aſk no mercy.—

HINGUAR.

If ſhe has deceiv'd me;
As I believe ſhe has, I'll ſhow her none.
This is the Lover whom her ſongs bewail,
The favourite, for whom ſhe guards her charms,
And mocks the credulous Dane. He mocks me too.
I'll take luxurious vengeance.—Guards.

[*Enter* Erick *with a plume and ſcarf, with Daniſh ſoldiers.*]

ERICK.

My Lord.

HINGUAR.

Unſheath your ſwords. Be ready, at a word,
To execute my orders. Send him hither. (*To* Erick.
(*Exit* Edda.
Surpriz'd, ſubdued, with dread of inſtant death,
I'll ſearch his ſecret ſoul; and then the ſlave,
For his preſumption, dies.

(*Enter* Alfred, *views the ſcene for a moment, and then advances intrepidly.*)

HINGUAR.

Thou traitor! villain!
How durſt thou, with thy puny arts, attempt
To practiſe upon me?

ALFRED.

Take back thoſe names;
Which utter'd here, do not diſhonour me;
But on thyſelf return.

HINGUAR.

Ha! Doſt thou brave me?
I'll pull thy courage down.

ALFRED.

Thou can'ſt not, Hinguar.
I mock the lifted ſword, and ſmile at death.

HINGUAR.

Tell me, impoſtor, who thou really art,
And who that woman is, thy falſe aſſociate,
In this vile artifice?

ALFRED.

Not from the dread
Of what thy vengeance can inflict, I anſwer;
But to aſſert my honour. To thy tents,
Altho' diſguiſed I came, no traitor I.
I came not, Hinguar, to attempt thy life;
But to enquire a much-lov'd ſiſter's fate;
For whom I trembled, ſince the hour I heard
She was thy captive.

HINGUAR.

Ha! thy ſiſter, ſayſt thou?
What is thy name?

ALFRED.

Surrey.

HINGUAR.

Thy name is known,
Of great account, amongſt the foes of Denmark.
Thou art the choſen friend of Engliſh Alfred.

ALFRED.

His faithful ſubject.

HINGUAR.

What's thy ſiſter's name?

ALFRED.

Emma. Alas! to great misfortune born!

HINGUAR.

Suſpend a while thy judgment of her fortune.
Retire. (*To the* GUARDS, *who go off*)
The tale of Alfred was deviſed
To ſmooth thy way to Emma.

ALFRED.

So it was,
Yet Alfred, if alive, in peril lives;
And doubtful, at this moment, is his fate.

HINGUAR.

Dead or alive, I care not. If he lives,
He never can regain his kingdom loſt;
Nor England e'er ſhake off the yoke of Denmark.
Surrey, tho' war and battle are my joy,
Yet I deſire ſometimes in peace to dwell.
Thy ſiſter's beauty has inflam'd my heart,
And policy accords with love's deſire.
The charming Emma ſhall be Hinguar's bride:
And England, partial to her own, obey
Princes, whoſe blood is native to the land.

ALFRED.

Thou haſt a Queen.

HINGUAR.

What then? The Gods of Denmark
Do not, like yours, their votaries confine
To the domeſtic bondage of one wife.
My ſoul abhors the daughter of old Gothred,
That furious woman, who was once my Queen:
Her I divorce; and on her vacant throne,
Will place thy ſiſter.

ALFRED.

That her faith forbids.
A Chriſtian cannot wed a heathen Lord.

HINGUAR.

Thy mind, averſe, is fertile in objections.
Saxon, thou ſpeak'ſt not with a brother's tongue.
Thou haſt deceiv'd me once.——Erick!

Enter ERICK.

ERICK.

My Lord.

HINGUAR.

Within my tent confine and guard him ſtrictly.

[*Exeunt* Alfred *and* Erick.

I do ſuſpect this is the Lover ſtill.
It much behoves me ſoon to be reſolv'd.
'Tis juſt, with fallacy, to prove the falſe;
And turn the arts of woman on herſelf.
I'll give a rude alarm, and ſhake her ſoul,
Even to the center. To my wiſh, ſhe comes,
Buried in thought. She has not yet obſerv'd me.

(*Steps aſide.*

Enter ETHELSWIDA.

ETHELSWIDA.

I fear we are diſcover'd and betray'd.
That Daniſh woman, whom I never lov'd,
Has held a private conference with Hinguar.
She pierces me with her malicious eyes,

Swimming in joy, and conſcious of detection.
She has o'erheard us.—

Hinguar *comes behind and ſeizes her arm.*

Ah!

HINGUAR.

Why doſt thou ſtart,
And look ſo guilty? Where's thy frenzy now?
The artful ſemblance, that deceiv'd the Dane?
Thy fear betrays the fraud I knew before.
Confeſs thy fault and truſt to Hinguar's mercy.

ETHELSWIDA.

Mercy!

HINGUAR.

Altho' thou haſt offended deeply,
Thy beauty pleads for thee: My love forgives.
One victim is enough.

ETHELSWIDA.

One victim! ah!

HINGUAR.

Yes, thy aſſociate, the pretended Bard,
Who call'd himſelf thy brother: He hath paid
The forfeit, with his life.

ETHELSWIDA.

(Staggers ready to faint.)

Thou bloody Dane!
Inhuman monſter! haſt thou murder'd Alfred?
And doſt thou ſpeak of love to Ethelſwida?

HINGUAR.

Alfred and Ethelſwida!

ETHELSWIDA.

Tyrant! Yes,
There's nothing now to ſave or to deny.
In me, behold the bride of royal Alfred!
Thy treachery, and not thy valour, Dane,
Upon our nuptial day, divorc'd our loves.
But neither force nor fraud can part us now.
Where Alfred is, my ſoul ſhall ſhortly be.

HINGUAR.

Thou'rt greatly chang'd. This courage is not real.
'Tis not thy nature.

ETHELSWIDA.

I ſhall change no more.
My former fear from love extreme aroſe.
Then, life was dear to me, for Alfred's ſake.
But now, ſince he is dead, for Alfred's ſake,
I wiſh to die, and loath the life I lov'd.

HINGUAR.

'Tis bravely ſpoken.

ETHELSWIDA.

'Tis not my deſire
To hold diſcourſe with thee. Go, from my ſight;
Thou'rt hideous to my eyes, thou vile aſſaſſin!
(*Turns away.*)

HINGUAR.

Hear me!

ETHELSWIDA.

I wou'd not, if I could prevent it.
But what I can I will. I ſpeak no more.
My lips are clos'd for ever.

HINGUAR.

Yet I know
A way to open them. That bitter ſmile,
I reck not; no, nor thoſe averted eyes.
Know, I have turn'd thy arts againſt thyſelf,
And caught thee, in thy own deceitful ſnare.
From impotence of mind, thou haſt reveal'd
Th' important ſecret, that the bard was Alfred.
Now, if he dies, it is thy folly kills him:
He lives, by thee, diſcover'd to his foe.

ETHELSWIDA.

Does Alfred live, and has my tongue betray'd him?
Have I diſcovered Alfred to his foe?
Barbarian!

HINGUAR.

Still thou may'ſt preſerve his life,
His fate on thee depends.

ETHELSWIDA.

On me!

HINGUAR.

On thee!
Accept my offer'd hand, and Alfred lives.
Nay, re-aſcends, in peace, his father's throne.
If not, I ſwear by Odin, awful name,
The God of battles, whom alone I ſerve,
This hour, my rival dies.

ETHELSWIDA.

Is this thy mercy?
Would Hinguar, conſcious that my heart is full
Of love to Alfred, take a faithleſs hand?

HINGUAR.

I wou'd; I will, this inſtant; ſpeak the word.

ETHELSWIDA.

I ſhudder at the thought, and loath thee more,
Much more than ever. Brutal is thy paſſion,
And horrible to womankind thy love.

HINGUAR.

Is this thy anſwer? Whilſt the Saxon lives,
Thou haſt ſome hope. Of him I will diſpoſe,
Without delay. (*Going.*)

ETHELSWIDA.

Stay, I conjure thee, ſtay.

HINGUAR.

My time is precious. I have deeply ſworn,
And fix'd the only ranſom of his life.

ETHELSWIDA.

Touch not the life of Alfred.

HINGUAR.

Every word,
Thy paſſion ſpeaks, accelerates his doom.
I go to ſee him die.

ETHELSWIDA.

(*ſeizing his robe.*)

Thou ſhalt not go.
By all that's holy, I will not ſurvive him.

HINGUAR.

Some of thy ſex, I know, have ſworn as much,
And have ſurviv'd the vow. (*Going.*

ETHELSWIDA.

ETHELSWIDA.

One moment ſtay.

HINGUAR.

Her countenance is like a troubled ſky,
When the wind veers about.

ETHELSWIDA. *(aſide.)*

Inſpire me, heaven!
The life of Alfred, and the fate of England,
Are in the balance. Yes, I am inſpir'd.
Heaven, that ſuggeſts the thought, will give me ſtrength
To act the generous deed.

HINGUAR.

Her mind gives way.

ETHELSWIDA.

Hinguar! ſhould I conſent to be thy bride,
Would Alfred's life be ſafe? What pledge for that?
What hoſtage haſt thou worth the King of England?

HINGUAR.

Conſider and demand.

ETHELSWIDA.

Set Alfred free:
The Engliſh camp is near: conduct him thither:
Let me have full aſſurance of his ſafety;
Then lead me to the altar. When my vow
Is made, tho' made to thee, our holy faith
Enjoins till death, obſervance. *(Exit.*

Manet

Manet HINGUAR.

Set him free
And truſt a woman's word! I like it not.
Fortune hath favour'd me, beyond my hopes.
My rival, both in empire and in love,
Is in my power. How ſhall I beſt improve
The proſperous hour, which my good planet rules?

Enter ERICK.

ERICK.

My Lord, the valiant Rollo craves admittance.

HINGUAR.

I will not ſee him. He is ſent by Ronex,
With ſome ungrateful meſſage. Aſk his buſineſs.

ERICK.

Unaſk'd he told it. In the field, to-day,
His brother preſs'd too near the Engliſh horſe:
They turn'd and took him priſ'ner. Rollo begs,
That he may be exchang'd.

HINGUAR.

For whom?

ERICK.

For Surrey,
Whom in the tent he ſaw.

HINGUAR.

He and his brother,
And all their tribe, are not worth ſuch a ranſom.
Erick, that Surrey is the King of England.—
Alfred himſelf.

ERICK.

Alfred!

HINGUAR.

He is, by heaven!
And my fair captive is the Mercian maid
By Alfred lov'd, the beauteous Ethelſwida!
Go, bring the Saxon hither.

[*Exit* Erick.

Manet HINGUAR.

Now, I'll ſound him.
The policy of ſtate enjoins his death:
The politicks of love ſuſpend his doom.
The inſtrument he is, by which I'll work
This woman to my will. If I can make
Her lover falſe to her, pride and revenge,
Will bring her not reluctant to my arms.
Thus play the paſſions of her wayward ſex.
Birds of a kind, they build their neſts alike;
And one true falcon, like another flies.
So, every woman, when her love is ſcorn'd,
By certain inſtinct, takes the ſame revenge.

(*Enter* ALFRED, *in his firſt dreſs*; *advances reſolutely.*)

Twice have we met to day, and both the times,
With borrow'd names and forms, thou haſt deceiv'd me.
Alfred; I know thee now.

ALFRED.

Hinguar, thou doſt.

HINGUAR.

Repine not at this chance. If we had met,
In liſts of combat or embattled field,
Death or captivity had been thy portion.

ALFRED,

ALFRED.

Uncertain ever is the fate of arms.

HINGUAR.

I have not found it ſo. In every battle
On my victorious banners fortune waits,
Suppoſe, then, that thou wert, by chance of war,
My pris'ner; ſay, what wou'dſt thou now expect
Should be thy doom?

ALFRED.

'Tis Hinguar's part to ſay,
And mine to ſuffer.

HINGUAR.

Thou ſhalt ſuffer nothing,
Unnworthy of a king. Tho' of the race
Of war and battle, who have ſtretch'd the ſpear
Of conqueſt o'er mankind; yet I will ſpeak
The words of peace. The Engliſh and the Danes
Have fought too long, for this conteſted land,
Whoſe ſpacious kingdoms can, with eaſe, contain
The rival nations; and the fertile fields
Glut, with luxurious plenty, their deſires.
Let us divide the land, and join in league
Eternal: Then, united, ſhake the world.

ALFRED.

Treaties of peace and leagues have oft been made;
But how obſerved, thou know'ſt.

HINGUAR.

There was no bond
To make the former treaties faſt and ſure.
The peace I offer now ſhall be confirm'd,
By ties, which bind the nations to each other.

My valiant brother left an only child,
In Denmark born, but here in England bred;
Matchleſs in form and feature is the maid;
Straight as the pine, that grows on Norway's hills.
She riſes tall above the virgin-train:
Blue rowls her melting eye: Her heaving breaſt
Is whiter than the ſnow, that's newly fallen.
This maid of beauty I will give to Alfred,
The pledge and bond of union and of peace.

(ALFRED *remains ſilent.*

Why doſt thou not reply? Doſt thou diſdain
A bride of Daniſh race?

ALFRED.

Silent, I ſtand
To learn the full extent of thy deſign.
Mean'ſt thou not ſtill to blend the nations more;
To mix the royal blood of either land;
And wed thyſelf a wife of Engliſh race?

HINGUAR.

I do.

ALFRED.

And 'tis my bride that thou haſt choſen;

HINGUAR.

Call her not thine. Nothing belongs to thee.
A captive has no right.

ALFRED.

Thou keep'ſt thy word,
And treat'ſt me like a king!

HINGUAR.

HINGUAR.

I'll make thee one,
Which now thou art not. Wed the maid of Denmark;
And o'er thy father's ancient kingdom reign.

ALFRED.

Unworthy I ſhould be to reign,—to live,
If I could make ſuch barter of my honour.
Is this the peace of Hinguar?

HINGUAR.

Yes: no other.

ALFRED.

Are theſe the terms that thou propound'ſt to Alfred?

HINGUAR.

They are.

ALFRED.

I am a captive and unarm'd;
So, with impunity, thou may'ſt inſult me.

HINGUAR.

I ſtand aſtoniſh'd at thy pride, thy folly.
Thou ruin'd Alfred, think of thy condition.
Thy life or death upon my nod depends.

ALFRED.

Ruin'd I am; but it was human weakneſs,
And no diſgraceful fault, that ruin'd Alfred.
Impell'd by tender, anxious, jealous love;
Deſpiſing Danger, to thy tents I came;
And doſt thou think I am ſo quickly alter'd?
Doſt thou imagine, that the dread of death
Can move my ſoul to yield to thee my bride?

And

And lead, if ſhe would follow me, to ſhame?
Hinguar, the meaneſt man of Saxon race,
In freedom born, would from ſuch baſeneſs ſhrink;
And ſcorn, with infamy, to purchaſe life.

HINGUAR.

Thou talk'ſt it well; and I have often heard
Of the perſuaſive eloquence of Alfred.
Plain are *my* words: They ſpeak thy certain doom.
If not the friend and firm ally of Hinguar,
Thou dy'ſt.

ALFRED.

My death will not conclude the war.
One courſe there is, if greatly thou aſpir'ſt
To reign ſupreme in England, and poſſeſs
With honour gain'd, fair Ethelſwida's charms.

HINGUAR.

I do.

ALFRED.

Then mark me, Dane! Tho' thou art ſprung
From heroes, more than human,—Odin's race,
Who ſtretch'd the ſpear of conqueſt o'er the world;
And thou, thyſelf, in war and battles bred,
Chain'd to thy ſword ſubmiſſive fortune lead'ſt;
Alfred, whoſe fathers have in battle fallen,
Whoſe valour ne'er could fix inconſtant fortune,
Offers to meet thee, in the liſted field;
And, by his ſingle arm, to thine oppos'd,
Decide the ſovereignty of England's realm,
By the award of heaven. In this encounter,
My nobles and my people will abide;
And, if thou conquer'ſt, Ethelſwida's thine.

HINGUAR.

What folly to preſume, thou fallen Alfred!
That I will free my captive, and contend
With him on equal terms!

ALFRED.

Brav'd as I was,
I thought it fitting, thus, to meet thy ſcorn.
Perhaps I entertain'd a glimpſe of hope,
That thou might chooſe thus nobly to prevail,
To gain by valour warlike England's crown;
And to the beauteous Ethelſwida come,
The victor, not the murderer, of her huſband.

HINGUAR.

The beauteous Ethelſwida has conſented
To give her hand. The terms which thou diſdain'ſt,
Vain-glorious Saxon! are more ample far,
Than thoſe which ſhe did ſtipulate for thee.
Thus ſhe rewards the conſtancy of Alfred.
Conſider that.

ALFRED.

No, not one moment, Dane.
Thy faith in love and war to me are known.

HINGUAR.

I will take no advantage of thy paſſion.
Hear my determin'd purpoſe: Thou ſhalt die,
Or wed the maid of Denmark. Heated now
And chaff'd with keen contention, pride rebels
Againſt thy reaſon. I will give thee time
To cool, and take the counſel of thy judgment.
One hour thou haſt to think.
(*To* Erick.) Conduct him hence.

ALFRED.

ALFRED.

Prudence requires that Hinguar too ſhould think.
Behold yon banners ſtreaming to the wind,
The hoſt of England will revenge their King.
(*Exeunt* Alfred *and* Erick.

HINGUAR.

This Alfred bears a high and haughty mind,
Not likely to ſubmit. Over his grave,
The path of Hinguar lies. When he is dead,
After a ſtorm of rage, a flood of tears,
The changeful ſky of woman will grow clear,
And beauty's beams on the new lover ſhine.

Enter EDDA.

EDDA.

The tidings which I bring, my pardon plead,
For this intruſion.

HINGUAR.

Say, what has befallen?

EDDA.

Ronex, the Queen, purſues the Captive's life.
Rollo, devoted to her will, addreſs'd me,
With promiſes of infinite reward,
If I would lend my aid. When I refus'd,
He threaten'd me. The party of the Queen
Was ſtrong enough, he ſaid, by force, to right her.

HINGUAR.

That was his errand here?

EDDA.

I ſeem'd to ſlight
His menaces. He kindled into rage;

Swore,

Swore, that the braveſt chiefs of Denmark's hoſt,
Were in his tent aſſembled with the Queen,
And waited his return, to riſe in arms,
And execute her orders.

HINGUAR.

I'll prevent them,
And cruſh this neſt of traitors. Rollo's tent;
That is the place?

EDDA.

It is.

HINGUAR.

Look to thy charge.
Here, thou art abſolute; the guards obey thee. (*Exit.*

Manet EDDA.

This lovely Captive will, at laſt, be Queen.
I muſt endeavour to regain her favour. (*Exit.*

End of the THIRD Act.

H ACT

ACT IV.

ALFRED *and* SURREY.

SURREY.

FOR England and for Ethelſwida's ſake,
To gain a little time, appear to yield.
'Ere this, the valiant Edwin is inform'd
Of thy diſaſter. Night approaches faſt;
And Daniſh diſcord aids the Engliſh arms.
Show not thy ſoul ſo open to the Dane.

ALFRED.

My friend, to whom my favour has been fatal,
It is thy fortune to behold the laſt
And darkeſt ſcene of Alfred's tragic life.
Something it grieves me, that mankind who judge
By the event! perhaps may blame my raſhneſs,
Do thou defend the aſhes of thy friend
And publiſh to the world—

Enter EDDA *and* ERICK.

EDDA.

Erick! the captive
Deſires, once more, to ſee the Saxon Prince.
For thy permiſſion to the king I'll anſwer.

ERICK.

ERICK.

'Tis not my part to queſtion, but obey,
(*Exit* Edda.
What can this woman mean?

ALFRED.

Surrey, I tremble,
And, like a coward, ſhake from head to foot.
My mind, for this encounter, is not arm'd.
Stern was my preparation, firm the mail
That bound my breaſt, againſt approaching death.
This trial takes me on another quarter;
The woes of Ethelſwida!—Riſe, my ſoul!
Againſt the ſtorm. I ought to ſtrengthen her;
And ſtand myſelf a rock.

Enter ETHELSWIDA *and* EDDA.

EDDA, (*to* Erick.)

Retire with me;
Let their diſcourſe be, as ſhe wiſhes, private.
(*Exeunt* Erick *and* Edda.

(ETHELSWIDA *comes towards* ALFRED, *with great emotion.*

ALFRED.

O, Ethelſwida, do not pierce my heart,
With looks ſo full of pity and of love!

ETHELSWIDA.

My ſoul looks thro' my eyes. My love, my lord,
My king, my huſband!

ALFRED.

Oh! thou fann'ſt the fire,
On which my reaſon aſhes heaps, in vain.
Like Hercules, I wear the poiſon'd robe:
Thou pull'ſt the garment; and my nerves are torn.
Why didſt thou wiſh to ſee the ruined Alfred?

ETHELSWIDA.

Not ruin'd yet. His love endangered Alfred:
My love ſhall ſave him ſtill.

ALFRED.

Can there be truth
In Hinguar? Now, my ſoul begins to fear.

ETHELSWIDA.

What doſt thou fear?

ALFRED.

The weakneſs of thy ſex.

ETHELSWIDA.

The weakneſs of my ſex!—I gueſs thy thoughts.
What did the tyrant ſay of Ethelſwida?

ALFRED.

What I deſpis'd, diſcredited, and ſcorn'd.
He ſaid, that he had ſought and won thy love;
That thou conſented'ſt to become his bride.

ETHELSWIDA.

On what conditions?

ALFRED.

Then, thou didſt conſent!
Hear! men and angels hear!

ETHELSWIDA.

Angels and men,
And Alfred, hear and judge. To ſave thy life,
To ſtop the bloody tyrant's lifted arm,
I did conſent, on this expreſs condition,
That Hinguar, inſtantly, ſhou'd ſet thee free.
When certain of thy ſafety, Alfred, then,
I was prepar'd and arm'd to mock the Dane——
To die.

ALFRED.

Forgive me, nobleſt of thy ſex;
Greater than fancy'd heroine of the ſong;
Forgive the wrong I offered to thy virtue.

ETHELSWIDA.

Accept thy freedom; let my hand reſtore
The king of England to his injur'd people,
Robb'd of their hero, by my luckleſs love.
And when the time ſhall come, as come it will,
Unleſs the planet of this hour ſhou'd ſtrike,
That Alfred his predicted fate fulfils;
And, in the circle of his empire ſits,
With glory crown'd, remember Ethelſwida,
Who died, exulting, to preſerve her Lord.

ALFRED.

Remember thee! This is no time to ſpeak,
To ope the floodgates of my burſting heart.
Remember thee! Whatever be my fate,
Thou ne'er ſhall be forgot, while Albion lifts
Her head above the waves. But know, my love,
That this barbarian never was ſincere:
For other terms to me he has propos'd;—
A Daniſh bride.

ETHELSWIDA.

To thee a Daniſh bride!

ALFRED.

Or inſtant death, to follow the refuſal.

ETHELSWIDA.

Alfred, thou liv'ſt!—

ALFRED.

I live till he returns,
For, tho' I ſcorn'd his offer, he perſiſted;
Gave me one hour more calmly to conſider.—
The time's expired.

ETHELSWIDA.

Thou muſt not, ſhalt not die,
Rather—

ALFRED.

Raſh is the counſel of affection.
I know the character of Hinguar well.
Nor life nor liberty will he beſtow
On thoſe whom he has wrong'd. If I ſhou'd wed
The Daniſh maid, I but embrace diſhonour,
And periſh with addition of diſgrace.

ETHELSWIDA.

What means the crafty Dane?

ALFRED.

I think he meant
To circumvent the ſoul of Ethelſwida.
Should I conſent to wed a Daniſh bride,
He hopes to rouze the woman in thy heart,
And profit by the rage of ſlighted beauty.

ETHELSWIDA.

Perhaps, the women of his ſavage land
Have taught him, thus, to judge of womankind.
If they are like the clouds, that change their form,
And, careleſs, fly before each ſhifting gale,
Far different is the ſoul of Ethelſwida.
Alfred, thy love is dearer than my life.
Dearer than both, is Alfred's life or fame.
In this extreme diſtreſs, remove me far;
Exclude me from thy thoughts; ſuppoſe me dead;
And act, as if I never had been born.

ALFRED.

Thy magnanimity gives edge to mine.
Rather than wed the Daniſh maid, I die:
Yet to elude the deadly rage of Hinguar,
And wait the chances of the coming night,
Big with event—

Enter ERICK.

ERICK.

My Lord, a numerous band,
Led by the Queen and the fierce Bothnic chief,
Surrounds the tents.

ALFRED.

Give me a ſword.

SURREY.

Take this.
If thro' their ſquadrons, I can win my way,
At midnight I return. (*Exit.*)

ALFRED.

One moment paſt,
On whoſe uncertain wing perdition floats;

The

The next may bring ſalvation. O, my love!
Ere Ronex comes, retire! Shun the firſt ſhock
Of her impetuous rage.

ETHELSWIDA.

Here I remain;
And live or die with thee. To fly from her,
Were to confeſs myſelf the wretch ſhe thinks me.
I'll meet her, as I ought. Wrong'd by her hate
And by her huſband's love, my innocence
I will not plead; but urge my injuries,
And crave of her redreſs.

RONEX.

(*Entering with Daniſh ſoldiers.*)

Spare thoſe that yield:
Kill all that dare reſiſt. (*Seeing* Ethelſwida.
See, where ſhe ſtands,
Like an enchantreſs, in the magic circle.
Advance and ſeize her.

ALFRED.

(*Drawing his ſword.*)

Hold! he dies, that ſtirs.
Till I have ſpoken. Hear, miſtaken Queen!
And learn from me how wide thy anger errs.

RONEX.

Ha! Who art thou, that bear'ſt ſo brave a form?
Yet in this place, to ſhame devoted, dwell'ſt
The pander and the guard of Hinguar's love.
What is thy name?

ALFRED.

My name?

RONEX.

Fear'ſt thou to tell?

ALFRED.

It will amaze thee much: My name is Alfred.

RONEX.

The King of England!

ALFRED.

Yes.

RONEX.

Thou look'ſt a King?—
Yet moſt incredible thou ſhould'ſt be Alfred.

ETHELSWIDA.

Not more incredible, than that the perſon,
Whoſe life thy raſh reſentment now purſues,
Is Alfred's bride, the princeſs Ethelſwida,
Born of a race diſhonour never ſtain'd,
And to the ſtricteſt rules of virtue bred.
My ſoul, O Queen, devoted to my Lord,
But one affection knows, and worſe than death
Abhors the love of Hinguar. Thy protection
My ſex demands and my misfortunes claim.
Embrace this fair occaſion to be juſt,
And generouſly repair the cruel wrong,
Thy thoughts have offered to my ſpotleſs fame.

RONEX.

The princeſs Ethelſwida!—Do I dream?
Or does each waking ſenſe aſſure a ſcene
Of things and perſons, more incredible
Then ever viſion of the night combin'd?

Enter ROLLO.

ROLLO.

Odin be prais'd. I come in time to ſave them.
Hearken, my liege, to faithful Rollo's voice.
This is the King of England!

RONEX.

I believe it.
Before thou cam'ſt, he had himſelf reveal'd.
His royal preſence warrants what he is.
Princeſs, the hatred and the fell intent,
With which, confeſſedly, at firſt I came,
Do not relate to thee, unlike in all,
To the imagin'd object of my wrath.
My error pardon; and my deeds ſhall ſhow
The pity, which I feel for thy misfortunes;
The high eſteem, in which I hold thy virtue.

ETHELSWIDA.

Thy pity for diſtreſs, thy love of virtue,
Nobly thy deeds may prove. Deliver Alfred
The victim of his love and of his virtue.
Long is the tale, too long to tell it now.
But Hinguar's voice has doom'd my Lord to death,
Becauſe to him he wou'd not yield his bride.
If then the cauſe of that decree offend thee,
Treat with the King of England, and prevent it.

ROLLO.

By Thor's right arm, the lady counſels well.
Renounce all thoughts of amity with Hinguar,
Who never will forgive thy friends or thee,
The inſult of this day.—Unite with England,
And give the nations peace.

RONEX.

Thy daring ſoul
Soars to the higheſt pitch of bold emprize.
But will the Daniſh chiefs adopt thy counſel?

ROLLO.

Make trial; prove their hearts; if they ſhould faint,
Ruin abides them. They have gone too far,
With ſafety, to recede. If he who draws
His ſword againſt a King, away ſhould throw
The uſeleſs ſcabbard, what ought *he* to do,
Who draws his ſword againſt a fell uſurper,
Who dares not ſhow the mercy of a Prince?

RONEX.

That argument comes near. I'll urge it home;
And, when we have conſulted and reſolv'd,
The King of England then—

ALFRED.

To their demands
Will cordially agree. A common cauſe,
In time of danger, leads to ſure accord.

(*Exeunt* Ronex *and* Rollo.

Manet ALFRED *and* ETHELSWIDA.

ALFRED.

My love, look up; and, with a face of joy,
Welcome the dawn of hope.

ETHELSWIDA.

Us'd to deſpair,
Like one in darkneſs long immured, as yet
I reliſh not the light.

ALFRED.

Soon ſhalt thou ſee
The rock of danger prove the rock of refuge;
And from the foe we dreaded ſafety come.

ETHELSWIDA.

Still I ſuſpect the faith of Daniſh friends.
But moſt, of all, my ſoul diſtruſts the Queen,
That furious woman, who puts off the ſex;
And, in her rage, againſt her huſband arms.

ALFRED.

Let us of what ſhe is avail ourſelves;
And o'er the bridge, ſhe builds, the torrent croſs,
Which roars unfordable.

ETHELSWIDA.

Before ſhe came,
Of the approaching night, big with event,
Thou waſt about to ſpeak. Fain wou'd I hear
Of ought that's good, and not deriv'd from Ronex.

ALFRED.

This hour,—for now the ſhades of night deſcend,
A choſen band, by valiant Edwin led,
Draw near the Daniſh camp; and, in the wood,
My orders wait. If noble Surrey lives,
Deeds will be done to night.

ETHELSWIDA.

And Hinguar too,
He will not ſlumber.—See, the Dane returns!

Enter

Enter ROLLO.

ROLLO.

The Queen of Denmark and the chiefs, in council,
Thy preſence wait, to fix their laſt reſolve.

ALFRED.

Whate'er on me depends, they may command.

Manet ETHELSWIDA.

Is the defect peculiar to myſelf?
Or is it incident to womankind,
By ſudden ſtrong impreſſions to be ſway'd?
The image of this dreadful Ronex haunts me;
And, like a ghoſt, excites inhuman fears.
When I was toſs'd upon a ſea of peril,
In which my foot could reach no ground of hope,
I ſwam, with courage, on the ſtormy waves.
In ſhallower water now, fearful I wade,
And reel at every ſurge. She gaz'd on Alfred;
Avow'd her admiration of his form.——

Enter EDDA.

EDDA.

Lady, I bring alarming news.

ETHELSWIDA.

To whom?

EDDA.

To thee.—When thou haſt heard my tidings, judge.
Among the Daniſh captains, one there is,
To me, by blood and friendſhip, ſtrictly join'd:
He told me, that the chiefs at laſt, agreed
To join with England, upon this condition,
That Engliſh Alfred weds the Daniſh Queen.

ETHELSWIDA.

I saw it in her eyes; foretold my fate.
Should he refuse, what then?

EDDA.

In that event,
They mean to treat with Hinguar, and restore
To him his captives. But their hope is high,
That Alfred will consent.

ETHELSWIDA.

Not, whilst I live.—
But will the Danes permit a woman's life
To stand a wall between them and their purpose?
The rage of Ronex, like a swelling wave,
Over that slender mound will burst amain;
Woman to woman is the fellest foe,

EDDA.

And such a woman, search from end to end
The world, all nations and religions try,
There is not to be found a parallel
To this unprincipled, unbridled Ronex.
The passion of the moment, is the God
She always serves.

ETHELSWIDA.

Alas! What shall I do,
Who in the level of her fury stand?

EDDA.

Ronex, thy deadly foe, is also mine.
Ere now, beneath her hatred I had fallen,
But for my pow'rful friend.

ETHELSWIDA.

Thy friend!—Is he
High in command?

EDDA.

To Bothnick Rollo next.
Many and brave the warriors, he commands:
Behind thy tent the paſſage to the plain,
This night, he guards.

ETHELSWIDA.

My hopes revive again.
Should I eſcape, or if, perchance, I periſh,
No more my deſtiny entangles Alfred.
For me, the eagle left his airy way,
And, ſtooping in my tract, his freedom loſt.
Edda, if pity of my loſt eſtate
Can move a woman's heart, or vaſt reward
Induce thy ſoul to do an act humane,
Perſuade thy friend.

EDDA.

To what?

ETHELSWIDA.

To let me paſs.

EDDA.

Then, whither wilt thou go?

ETHELSWIDA.

If I can gain
The ſhelter of the neighb'ring wood, I'm ſafe.
But any place I hold more ſafe than this.
Wilt'ſt thou aſſiſt me?

EDDA.

I embrace thy fate.
Thro' the dark night, and thro' ſurrounding arms,
I ſhall attend thee hence, if I can win

My

My friend to guide our steps. Forthwith, I'll try:
Please to thy tent repair.

ETHELSWIDA.

I wrong'd thee once;
And thou, at last, hast prov'd thyself my friend.
With perfect trust, my soul on thee relies.
May angels prompt thy tongue. (*Exit.*

Manet EDDA.

No art of mine;
The dread of Ronex, working on her mind,
Conjur'd each spectre up, I wish'd to raise.
I'll guide her steps committed to my care;
And lead her safe to Hinguar's longing arms.

End of the FOURTH Act.

ACT.

ACT V.

SCENE, *The Tents----At a diſtance mountains and trees; the moon in creſcent, and the ſtage darkened.*

Enter ETHELSWIDA.

ETHELSWIDA.

HAD ſhe not fail'd, 'ere this, ſhe had return'd.
Unbraced by vain ſuſpenſe and expectation,
My ſpirit flags; and, like a racer tired,
Swerves in the courſe. I am not what I was.
Hark to that hollow ſound!—Is it the hum
Of voices roll'd together in the wind?
Or roars the blaſt of autumn through the woods?
Alas, I was not wont to fear the night.
When, wan'dring on the pleaſant banks of Trent,
By moon-light, oft I trac'd the glittering ſtream,
And mus'd on Alfred. Peaceful were the ſounds,
And to my temper tun'd, which then I heard.
My ſteps, light as they were, amongſt the leaves,
From her high rooſt the fluttering ſtock-dove ſcar'd;
Or ſtartled from his lair the bounding ſtag.
Begirt with armies now, hemm'd round with ſpears,
I fear at every ſtep to rouſe a foe.

Thro' the dim ſhades, behold a human form.
'Tis Edda.—Ah, what tidings!

Enter EDDA.

EDDA.

Good—and bad.

ETHELSWIDA.

Of Alfred what?

EDDA.

Enrag'd at his refuſal
To wed their willing Queen, the Daniſh chiefs
His ſword demanded, and to Rollo gave
Charge of his perſon. Still they ſit in council
New courſes to deviſe.

ETHELSWIDA.

Would I were hence,
Before thoſe dreadful counſellors determine.
What ſays thy friend?

EDDA.

He anſwers for thy ſafety,
If firm thy purpoſe be, this night, to fly.

ETHELSWIDA.

Bleſt be thy tongue!

EDDA.

What elſe remains to ſay
Or do,—the cover of the tent will hide.

ETHELSWIDA.

Yet, ere I plunge into the ſtream of fate (*kneels*)
Angels! and ſaints, who once yourſelves were human,
Now, perfect ſpirits and with Seraphs mix'd,
Adminiſter

Adminiſter to heaven's eternal King!
O, hear my ſuppliant voice, and to the throne
Where ſovereign mercy ſits, prefer the prayer
Of one in deep diſtreſs, who in the hour
Of her proſperity, never forgot
To bow before your ſhrines Gracious deſcend,
Thro' darkneſs, night and death, my footſteps guide.
But if I'm doom'd, in the rough path to fall,
O, guard the King of England; from the rage
Of cruel foes—preſerve the life of Alfred!

(*Exeunt to the tent.*

Enter ROLLO, *with two* Daniſh *ſoldiers.*

ROLLO.

It is the Queen's command.

FIRST SOLDIER.

The warrant's good.
The Queen commands our ſwords.

SECOND SOLDIER.

Yes, to kill men,
Arm'd and reſiſting; that's a ſoldier's taſk.
To kill a helpleſs woman likes me not.

ROLLO.

If you demur!—

(*Firſt* ſoldier *ſpeaks aſide to the ſecond; then turns to* Rollo.)

FIRST SOLDIER.

My Lord, we are reſolved.

ROLLO.

I know you reſolute and ſecret both;
Selected you as worthy of reward,
Befitting ſuch a ſervice.

FIRST SOLDIER.

We'll perform it.

ROLLO.

The deed, when done, muſt never be avow'd;
But to the chance of this unruly night
Solely imputed.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Silent is the grave!—
Whoever ſees us dies.

SECOND SOLDIER.

Look there my Lord,
(Ethelſwida *and* Edda *in the back ground.*
Who may they be, who yonder ſteal along,
Timid their ſtep and mien?

ROLLO.

Forthwith, purſue.
She in the azure mantle, is the princeſs.
Of her make ſure. (*Exeunt the* Danes.

Manet ROLLO.

Not without much regret,
Did I conſent to Ethelſwida's death.
My ſoul was loth to hurt the lovely maid;
Loth to put out the radiant ſtar of beauty,
'Ere half her courſe was run. Neceſſity
Impos'd this deed on my reluctant mind.
For, tho' the ſtar was bright, ſhe beam'd deſtruction;
And, like a comet, from her treſſes ſhook
Diſcord and war.

Enter RONEX.

RONEX.

Are my commands obey'd?

ROLLO.

ROLLO.

Juſt as my ſoldiers were about to enter,
And execute their orders, from the tent,
With ſilent ſteps ſhe ſtole: they ſaw, purſued,
And have, ere now, o'ertaken.

RONEX.

Speed their ſwords!—
My fortune, now, is on the anvil placed,
For fate to ſtrike and faſhion good or evil.
Hinguar comes on, dark as the night that ſhades him

ROLLO.

He ſhall be met.

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

Hail, ſovereignty of Denmark!
A foe, whom we expected not, draws near;
The hoſt of England—

ROLLO.

Ha!

MESSENGER.

Cover the plain.
Along their line, I heard the voice of Erick.
That traitor leads them on.

ROLLO.

Caught in a net,
Spread by the hand of chance!——

RONEX.

What ſhall we do?
What refuge now in counſel, or in arms?

ROLLO.

The King of England is our only refuge.
Make him thy friend; and he will quickly turn
On Hinguar's troops the torrent of his arms.

RONEX.

No choice is left. Fly, and bring Alfred hither.
(*To the officer.*

ROLLO.

In pledge of amity, reſtore his ſword.

Manent ROLLO *and* RONEX.

RONEX.

Rollo, thou look'ſt as if thou didſt repent,
What we have done. My ſoul's a conſtant ſtream,
Which knows no changeful ebb.

ROLLO.

If Alfred ſhould
Deſire to ſee, that Ethelſwida's ſafe—

RONEX.

I'll find an anſwer fit. He comes. Behold him,
O'er his fix'd eye, his frowning brows project.
His mind is high wound up.

Enter ALFRED.

ROLLO.

Now, King of England,
Let no reſentment of the paſt provoke
Thy ſoul to judge, with paſſion, of the preſent.
Hinguar, thy mortal foe, comes on reſolv'd
His lovely prize, by valour, to regain.
Oppos'd to him we ſtand, equal in arms.

But

But from their hill the Engliſh hoſt deſcend,
To turn the ſcale of combat. Doſt thou wiſh
The tyrant to prevail?

ALFRED.

Anſwer direct
Thy queſtion needs not. Hinguar is my foe.
Grant me thoſe equal terms, I aſk'd at firſt;
And to your arms I join the force of England.

RONEX.

Thy terms are more agreeable to Ronex,
Than thoſe the policy of Denmark nam'd.
By Frea, eldeſt goddeſs of the ſky,
The ancient arbiter of human things,
I ſwear to the performance.

ALFRED.

In that tent,
If Ethelſwida reſts, I wiſh to ſee her.

RONEX.

Far from this ſpot, where Hinguar points his march,
The Princeſs to a ſafer place is mov'd,
Near my pavilion.

ALFRED.

Ha!

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

A fierce attack
Is on the right begun.

ROLLO.

The troops of England!—
If Alfred gives his aid, it muſt be now.

This

This officer will on thy ſteps attend;
And to the Daniſh chiefs announce thy purpoſe.
That is the way direct. Along this path
I go to combat Hinguar. (*Exit* Rollo

ALFRED.

Queen of Denmark,
To the afflicted Captive comfort give.
She is the bond and cement of our frienſhip.
(*Exit Alfred.*

RONEX.

Then we ſhall ne'er unite. He does ſuſpect me.
He rivetted on mine his jealous eyes.
There is no proof, and I will brave the ſuſpicion,
With loud appeals, with vows and proteſtations
Of pureſt innocence.--That ſhout is near;
It comes againſt the wind:—My foes prevail.
Nearer and nearer ſtill!—'Tis time to fly.
On one ſide Alfred, on the other Hinguar.
Here let them meet, and fight for Ethelſwida. (*Exit.*

HINGUAR.

(*behind the ſcenes.*

Purſue along the vale; the leaders kill,
But ſpare the common men.

Enter HINGUAR *with ſoldiers.*

HINGUAR.

This is the place.
Now I have reach'd the port of my deſire.
The prize of love and conqueſt anchors here.
Where are the guards? where ſhe, whom they ſhou'd guard?
What does this awful ſolitude portend?

Enter

(Enter, from the oppoſite ſide of the ſtage, the two Aſſaſſins, *with the robe of* Ethelſwida, *ſtained with blood.)*

SECOND SOLDIER.

Twice have we chang'd our courſe. To keep this robe,
We loſe ourſelves.

HINGUAR.

By Hela's ſulphur'd fires,
The robe of Ethelſwida, ſtain'd with blood!
Infernal villains!—

SECOND ASSASSIN.

Caught, undone,—the King!

FIRST ASSASSIN.

(Throwing down the mantle.)

We are but inſtruments to work the will
Of our ſuperiors.

HINGUAR.

Have you killed the lady,
Who own'd this garment?

FIRST ASSASSIN.

To deny were vain.
The Queen commanded us, and we obey'd.

SECOND ASSASSIN.

We know our fate; and we will die like men.

HINGUAR.

Long ſhall you live in pain and wiſh for death.
The ragged Saw ſhall tear your tortur'd limbs;
And when your carcaſſes are all one wound,

Faſtened on iron hooks you ſhall be hung,
And die by inches.—Bear them to to their fate.

(*Exeunt, guarded.*

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

My Lord, the troops which on the left advanc'd,
Attack'd, and ſoon ſubdu'd the guards of Ronex;
But charged by Engliſh Alfred, in their turn,
Before him fly.

HINGUAR.

My trumpets!—ſound a charge,
And call the ſtraggling ſoldiers to my ſpear.
The charm, that drew me to this ſpot, will bring
The Saxon hither.—Odin, brace my arm,
And let my ſword, like thine own thunder, fall
On Alfred's creſt.

(*The trumpets ſound.*

Enter ALFRED, *with* Engliſh *ſoldiers, and the* OFFICER *of the firſt* ACT.

ALFRED.

Behold the man!—

HINGUAR.

Whoſe ſteel
Shall pierce thy heart.

ALFRED.

Thy menaces, Barbarian,
Tho' fierce and rude, become thee better now,
Than when I heard them laſt.

HINGUAR.

I threatened then;
And now I will perform.

ALFRED.

ALFRED.

My ſoldiers brave
Reſtrain your ardour.
(*To Hinguar.*) Spare thy people, King!
Let us, alone, in mortal ſtrife engage;
Whilſt every Dane and Saxon ſhall look on;
And by the fortune of their Prince abide.

HINGUAR.

'Tis what I wiſh'd; but did not think thou durſt
Come from the crowd, and, ſingle, meet my arm.

ALFRED.

In more than this miſtaken: But by deeds,
Not words, I will convince thee.

HINGUAR.

Prompt thy tongue;
But ſlow thy hand. Come on. Odin for Denmark!
(*Draws.*

ALFRED.

For England and her King, the living God!
(*They fight*, Hinguar *falls.*
Now, where is Hinguar's pride?

HINGUAR.

Here, in his heart,
Unconquer'd ſtill the pride of Hinguar dwells.
To die in battle is a warrior's death.
The hero fights and falls; but never yields.
Hinguar has fought. From ſea to ſea, his ſword,
Thro' England blaz'd, a meteor dropping blood.
The wolf and eagle followed to the feaſt,
Tracking its courſe. The warrior, old in arms,

The youthful chief, by many a virgin lov'd,
Lay reeking in their gore.

ALFRED.

As thou doſt now!
The virgin's and the widow's curſe have found thee,
And laid in duſt the troubler of the land.

HINGUAR.

In duſt thy hopes are laid. Behold that robe.
Belike, thou know'ſt it.

ALFRED.

Ethelſwida's robe,
With bloody gaſhes torn! More fell than bears
That ſtarve on hill of ſnow, how durſt thou lift
Thy curſed hand?

HINGUAR.

No. Ethelſwida fell
By Ronex. Yet, altho' I killed her not,
Her death delights me. Saxon, I rejoice
At thy calamity. Happy my lot,
Compar'd with thine. To the Valkyrian maids
I go, to Odin and the hall of joy.
Thou of thy Love bereft, ſhalt waſte thy days,
In lamentation, like the wretch who pines
By Hela's lake and drinks the poiſon'd ſtream,
Pour'd from the jaws of ſnakes. I laugh at thee,
And, like my fathers, die. (*dies.*

ALFRED.

His dying voice
Of me prophetic ſpake. O, Ethelſwida!
And Surrey too! in Alfred's cauſe has fallen.
Now on the top, the ſummit of affliction,

Like

Like a tree, ſtript of bark and branch, I ſtand,
Bare on all ſides, and naked to the ſtorm. (*falls.*

Voice behind the ſcenes.

Where is the conquering King, my lord, my huſband?
Make way and let me ruſh—where is my Alfred?

ETHELSWIDA *enters and ſees him.* (Edwin *following.*)

ETHELSWIDA.

Eternal powers! Is this the ſcene of joy?
(*After a pauſe, looking at the robe.*
I am the cauſe accurſt of Alfred's death,
And England's ruin. Bear me witneſs, heaven!—
But words are vain. Let thoſe bewail their doom,
Who live to ſuffer, and prolong their pain.
The gleam of hope, extinguiſh'd by deſpair,
Sharpens my ſenſe of miſery, and ſpreads
A deeper horror on my tortur'd mind.
My ſure, and now my only friend, come forth.
(*Draws a dagger.*
Spirit of Alfred, ſtay!
(*Alfred revives.*

ALFRED.

The ſhades of death
Still ſwim before my eyes. I heard the ghoſt
Of Ethelſwida call!

ETHELSWIDA.

He lives, he lives!
My heart ſurcharg'd, burſts with a flood of joy.

ALFRED.

Her voice, her form; 'tis she, 'tis she herself!
My Ethelswida!

(*Runs into her arms.*)

ETHELSWIDA.

Alfred! Gracious heaven!
For ever blest thy Providence divine!

ALFRED.

In error lost, upon the brink we stood,
Of bottomless perdition. O, my love,
Most certain seem'd thy death.

ETHELSWIDA.

I saw thee dead,
And rais'd my arm to join my lot to thine.

ALFRED.

I heard the dagger fall. It was reserv'd
For thee, thou pride and glory of thy sex,
To give the noblest proof of love—and live.

ETHELSWIDA.

Ere since the sad commencement of our woes,
Deep on my heart engrav'd was the resolve,
Not to survive thee in the storms of fortune.
That anchor held like fate.

ALFRED.

Whence came that sign
Which friends and foes deceived?

ETHELSWIDA.

True was the sign
Of death. The wearer of my garment died,

For

For me miſtaken.

ALFRED.

'Twas an wounded mind
Which laid me low. Oppreſs'd with grief I ſunk.
Edwin, my friend—

DEVONSHIRE.

Compleat is Edwin's joy
To ſee his Prince with love and glory crown'd

ALFRED.

The ſcene is ghaſtly, and with death deform'd.
In place more fitting, of our friends and foes
According to deſert, we will decree.
The nations now are one; with Hinguar died
The enmity of England and of Denmark.
My people with their monarch ſhall be bleſt
Whilſt ſuch a partner of my empire reigns.

ETHELSWIDA.

Nor ſhall the ſtory of the toils of Alfred,
Sink to oblivion, in the tide of time,
Or to poſterity deſcend in vain.
From hence the people of the land he lov'd;
And future Princes of that land may learn,
Fearleſs to ſtem the torrent of diſaſter,
And ne'er of England, or themſelves, deſpair.

FINIS.

ALFRED.

'Twas an wounded mind
Which had me low. Oppress'd with grief I faint.
wife, my friend—

DEVONSHIRE.

Complete is Edwin's joy
he his Prince with love and glory crown'd.

ALFRED.

The scene is ghastly, and with death deform'd.
place more fitting, of our friends and foes
ning to deter, we will decree.
nations now are one; with Hingvar died
amity of England and of Denmark.
people with their monarch shall be blest
shall such a partner of my empire reign.

ETHELSWIDA.

or shall the glory of the toils of Alfred
to oblivion, in the ride of time.
to posterity delcend in vain.
nce the people of the land he lov'd;
future Princes of the land may learn,
ds to them the terror of difaster,
nder of England, or themselves, delpair.

FINIS